

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

Sub 3 1. An exhaust gas purifying apparatus of an internal combustion engine, comprising:

exhaust gas purifying means, provided in an exhaust passage of the internal combustion engine, for adsorbing NOx in exhaust gas when an air-fuel ratio of the exhaust gas is lean, and releasing or reducing the adsorbed NOx when an oxygen concentration of the exhaust gas is reduced;

a light-off catalyst provided upstream of the exhaust gas purifying means in the exhaust passage, said light-off catalyst having a lower O₂ storage ^{capability} ~~ability~~ than said exhaust gas purifying means; and

control means for controlling the air/fuel ratio of the exhaust gas so that an atmosphere having a reduced oxygen concentration is produced around said exhaust gas purifying means when an NOx conversion efficiency of the exhaust gas purifying means is decreased.

Sub 11 2. The exhaust gas purifying apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein said exhaust gas purifying means includes,

an NOx catalyst that adsorbs NOx in the exhaust gas when the air/fuel ratio of the exhaust gas is lean, and releases or reduces the adsorbed NOx when the oxygen concentration of the exhaust gas is reduced, and

a three-way catalyst provided downstream of the NOx catalyst in the exhaust passage, for reducing harmful components in the exhaust gas when the air-fuel ratio of the exhaust gas is in the neighborhood of a stoichiometric ratio.

Sub 11 3. The exhaust gas purifying apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein an amount of oxygen adsorbed on said light-off catalyst is not greater than about 150 cc per one-liter volume of the catalyst when measured by an oxygen pulse method.

b 3 ^{Sub} p 1/4. The exhaust gas purifying apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein an oxygen component stored in said light-off catalyst is not greater than about 25g per one-liter volume of the catalyst.

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